

“Soil Your Undies” and other ways to get your hands dirty

This creatively named project is all about measuring the health of Otago soils.



Clockwise from top: Fresh undies made by Macraes Moonlight School students, ready to be buried; Students at Five Forks School prepare to bury their undies; Teachers learning about soil health during a professional development day.

School students participating in the Soil Your Undies citizen science project are learning all about soil, like how it's formed and how to assess the different components of soil. Old undies are one of the tools they are using to measure soil health—perhaps not one of the scientific methods you remember learning about at school.

The project is a collaboration between NOSLaM (North Otago Sustainable Land Management), Enviroschools, Beef and Lamb, AgResearch, the University of Otago and six schools in the North Otago area, with support from the East Otago Catchment Group, Fonterra Farm Source and the Foundation of Arable Resource.

The role of the undies is simple: students buried the (clean) undies in their school grounds and at home over a few weeks in September; when they're dug up, they'll be able to tell us a bit about the soil.

The undies will be uncovered in early November, and by measuring how much they've degraded, students will be able to tell how healthy the soil is: the worse the state of the undies, the healthier the soil.

NOSLaM Engagement Officer Bridget McNally said it was great to get students interested in soil health from a young age.

“Soil Your Undies is a fun, engaging and hands-on way for students, teachers and the community to learn about the importance of healthy soils. We're here to spread knowledge of good land management practices—and those seeds need to be planted at a young age.”

Creepy crawlies

Earthworms are another soil health indicator for the students to examine.

The teachers involved in the project recently had a full day of professional development on soil health, which involved getting their hands into the soil and trying out the activities they can do with students to get them excited about soil.

They discovered that identifying worms was a tricky task—even with help from the experts on hand.

The students are also getting first-hand experience working with dung beetles through this project. Dung beetles are described as “Eco-system engineers”, as they deal with dung, improving soil health and water quality in the process.

The aim of the project is to get people excited about soil, map local soil health and explore strategies for improving soil health. A community event is being planned for November, where the students will be able to share the findings of their research with the wider community.

Learn more about dung beetles online: dungbeetles.co.nz



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www.curiousminds.nz/funding/participatory-science-platform/

www.orc.govt.nz/ecofund